

Jay Adams, Santa Monica, CA, 1977. There's a reason they called it the Dog Bowl. Those were the days when vertical riding took a really big leap forward.



# GLEN E. FRIEDMAN

WORDS: Lance Mountain  
PHOTOS & CAPTIONS: Glen E. Friedman

I think we all know who Glen E. Friedman is (or should). Maybe it's even unconscious since we've all grown up with his photography all around us, from the original *SKATEBOARDER* magazine in the 1970s where he began his illustrious career as a teenager, his work with early hardcore punk bands, to many of the foremost hip-hop and rap groups (record covers too numerous to mention), or if you're lucky like me, from working with him. His part in documenting that era can never be recreated because those times will never be lived again. This is something Glen is proud of and should be. His six hardcover books from Burning Flags Press are all incredible documents of these times and his artistry.

I know it was partly because of working with Glen that my ideas on shooting were formed, as they were, and equally passed down in the same way since—even if the direct influences are not known by those who benefitted. Glen was the first to give me a cover and interview 27 years ago. I would love to be able to do the same with some of the next generation of skaters I shoot, as I'm sure would the many other skate photographers he has influenced and inspired over the years.

I really liked seeing Glen shooting skating again. It was cool. The guys he shot were stoked he was shooting photos of them. I shot a photo of him shooting and he looked the same as he did back in the day: crouched down in a ball, knees together, soles of his Converse out, long sleeve under short sleeve, same camera. He just looked the way he always has: very cool. To spend time with Glen and see him shoot photos the other day was amazing. My sincere thanks for all these moments, on film and off. So, let's see what Glen has been up to the last few years.

## Before photography or skateboarding, what were you into?

I can hardly remember a time before skating, but I was into baseball, slot cars, and BMX when it was just starting out. I was always into music, too. But it was skateboarding, I feel, that really gave me my personal identity before almost anything else.

## How old were you and what was the culture of the day?

Well, I started getting into skating by the time I was 11 or so, as well as BMX, skating, and AYSO soccer as the usual team sports were big. But skating was looked at as a total novelty, in large part because so many people just couldn't even understand it, much like punk and hip-hop in the years to follow when they just started happening. People didn't understand. It was like, "What the fuck is that?" Hard to imagine for younger people nowadays, I bet.

## What did you want to do or think you would do when you grew up?

I never really had any idea that when I started taking photos of my friends skating or in bands that it would be what I became known for and that I'd make a career out of it. I just did it because I knew I could and because I thought I had to. It was like the responsibility I put on my own shoulders that I thought needed to be done, deserved to be done, was required to be done, by me. I was in the middle of too much incredible shit not to share it and help spread it.

## How did you get into photography?

Not really sure how I got into it, but all of a sudden, like the first time I got a Polaroid for Christmas when I was like nine years old, I was really good at it. So, I guess when you're good at something as a kid it gives you confidence in general. So, perhaps that's how I "got into" it.

## How did your relationship start with skateboarding?

I was probably 10 years old and got a Makaha board, since other kids around were getting into it. Soon after, I was riding in the streets and sidewalks in the neighborhood, outside the schoolyard at Kenter. I had no idea a few years later we'd be skating the banks inside.

## Your first published photo was of Jay Adams?

Indeed, from my first roll of 35mm film, shot with a borrowed camera. I was fucking stoked, and so was everyone else. Full-page subscription ad for *SKATEBOARDER* when it was still a bi-monthly and a subscription cost \$6, \$7 foreign. First time anyone saw someone getting above the coping and out. It was a radical shot, although not the best I shot of the day at all. It was radical and had attitude. Bolster, the editor at the time, saw that, and even though people who skated pools back then knew he was bailing, just kicking the board out, many thought because it was in the magazine that somehow he miraculously was pulling it off. Pretty funny, but either way it certainly stoked a lot of people. I was bummed it wasn't the best shot, but I was so blown away I got a full page, a credit, and a check. The credibility I got from that was awesome for a 14-year-old.

Tony Farmer at Lance Mountain's pool. I'd never met this guy or even heard of him before this day, but when someone shreds, it's undeniable. And if they got any style, I'm gonna be inspired to shoot something even if I haven't shot a skater in years. It's in my blood. And if you're gonna do it well, it's gotta be a part of you.



## “WHY WASTE THE FILM ON SHIT YOU DON'T LIKE?”

### Was that planned or did you just fall into it?

Well, in my head it was totally planned, but really I never could have imagined it would set me on the path it did. I just wanted to shoot what I was seeing and inspire others to get involved and, really, that's all I've ever wanted to do and still continue to do. And I had such respect for the things I was shooting I felt I had to do all the subjects the justice they deserved in my eyes. My pictures had to be as badass as the people I was shooting, otherwise there was no reason to do it. I didn't think anyone else had the perspective and insight I did, so it was a personal responsibility.

### Do you have any photos of anything before that or was skateboarding the first thing you shot?

I think I shot some other family stuff. Pictures at SeaWorld were the first thing I ever remember shooting and shooting well. The shot of Shamu the whale being all the way out of the pool and touching the ball hung across the stadium and having it composed perfectly with that Christmas Polaroid, I could do that shit.

### Did you have a favorite skater or favorites to shoot?

I think I always loved to shoot Jay [Adams] since he was always radical and would do things that others didn't. His aggressive persona and style were contagious. Looking back and thinking about it, he had charisma too. He also liked photography. He even gave me ideas for angles when we were kids. When we shot that first published photo for both of us, I was 14; he was 15. It's crazy when you look back.

Alva was also like that, but more in control. Shooting Tony was easier because he was a premeditated radical. I liked shooting them the most, but Paul Constantineau's style was always incredible. I loved to shoot PC. Jay Smith, who was a close friend, was also fun to shoot. His laybacks on coping could not be matched. That center spread we got together in SKATEBOARDER was another one of my all-time favorite shots, post DT era. Big air is cool, but style is really what it's all about, always has been. Style with aggression. It's inspirational.

### Out of everything you have shot, who or what were your top five subjects?

Well let's just not compare skating with music, OK? I'll say in music I was inspired in the same ways as I was with skating, but with music it wasn't so much the subjects' personal style as much as their intense energy. Actual music and lyrics got me motivated to shoot the best I could. Black Flag worked harder than anyone you ever knew, and once I got to know them well I found this out and I think a lot of my photos of them exhibit this like few others. Their intensity I could only hope to match with my photography. I loved shooting them from '80-83. Ian MacKaye is also one of my favorite subjects, from Minor Threat to Fugazi, even to the Evens now. Integrity, passion, and heart motivate me, and when the subject has it in spades it kicks my ass to take great photos and to help spread the word and inspiration. I loved shooting Public Enemy because, at the time, I knew we were doing something that was important. I never realized it at the time with any of my prior subjects, but by this time I knew it was going to be “something.” And just to round it out, why don't I just add the Beastie Boys because they always made me laugh to tears, on top of being very creative dudes.



Lance in his own pool with old friends like Jeff Grosso and I looking on like it's 30 years ago but tearing it up harder than ever. Riding like this is no joke.



## “SKATING INDEED IS IN MY BLOOD, TOO, BUT IT’S NOT ALL THAT RUNS THROUGH MY VEINS.”

**Once you started having photos printed, were you particular on who you shot?**

I never shot people who I didn't like or didn't think were radical. Number one reason: why waste the film on shit you don't like? Number two: why even let someone think that you're inspired enough to shoot them when you're not? I mean, there were times, like contests, where you shoot people you don't really want to since you want to cover the event, but, honestly, even then, if there were skaters I just thought were kooks, I wouldn't shoot them even if they were placing. Fact is, back then, contests were events the magazine covered so you shot them, and sometimes the limits were pushed but, honestly, it's like the worst place to shoot. At gigs, I shot the bands I liked, plain and simple. Sometimes I didn't even do that 'cause I wanted to just watch the show without a camera. But rarely did I shoot someone I did not like, if ever. I never considered myself a documentarian taking photos of everything. I just took photos of the extraordinary to kick some ass.

**Tell us a story from the heyday of this time.**

A story? What kind? You can't ask that silly question! How about this: Like when I asked you to roll in frontside into the halfpipe at Whittier, when it had more than a foot of stagnant water in the bottom of it, and we got the full sequence for your first-ever magazine interview, in *Thrasher*?

**What was it like to witness the downfall of the skateboard industry?**

Which time? It's a cyclical thing, that's what everyone said back then. The fact was it didn't happen overnight, at least I knew that from working at the magazine. All the signs were there and then it just happened, but the hardcore always survive since they don't depend on others. The hardcore do it no matter what, so business, unless you were really stupid, would be overcome. You'd wait it out because you had to. If you didn't care enough or it wasn't in your heart, you gave up, and good riddance to you. I mean, the magazine diversifying because the industry could not support a full-color glossy, it was a bummer, but it was what they thought they had to do. Big mistakes were made, but that cleared the way for *Thrasher* and, in turn, *Transworld*. Neither would ever become what *SKATEBOARDER* was in its heyday, but they filled their niche.

In some ways it was a huge drag, really. I mean, I was just graduating high school, and *SKATEBOARDER* had become my identity in life in many ways, and it was transforming and eventually closing down. It was heavy, but really it was just one door closing and another opening. And with my enthusiasm and thought, I guess I just hit the ground running and it always worked out good for me.

**Do you think you can even describe it to anyone today?**

Well, honestly, I don't even know how people in the industry are today. It's hard for me to even believe that Jake is still up at *Thrasher* and Grant does *The Skateboard Mag*. I mean, it's just weird to me. Skating indeed is in my blood, too, but it's not all that runs through my veins.

**Was there a time that you thought, "I have shot my last skate photo?"**

No. Never. I mean, there may have been times where I had not shot a skate photo for five or even 15 years it feels like but, you know, that's not such a big deal. When I am motivated or inspired I will do it, or direct others to do it.

Rick Charnowski (left), "Skate filmmaker extraordinaire" shows you with his skating why he's so good at the art of skate filmmaking. Pat Ngoho (right), old friend from the old-school, shows in his life every day that he comes from a place where style is everything.



## “WHY EVEN LET SOMEONE THINK THAT YOU’RE INSPIRED ENOUGH TO SHOOT THEM, WHEN YOU’RE NOT?!”

**You started shooting more bands, punk then rap. Was it because the energy of something fresh and exciting being created was the real draw? Again, documenting something that had not happened before?**

Well, in fact, it was just a natural progression for me. Back then, a lot of skaters were in bands. As it was going through that first really major downturn, punk rock, hardcore punk with young people to be more precise, was just in its infancy, and indeed a lot of the same players were involved. The energy and excitement was all there, even more so at times, so the transition was really simple. It was nothing; it just happened and, honestly, by 1984-85 the same thing that had kind of happened in skateboarding was happening in music. Then I was seeing hip-hop come up from the underground and truly inspire me, as well as an even larger nation of people than skateboarding or punk. It was just the next step. I took it without ever forgetting or even really leaving my roots behind. I wore them on my sleeve constantly. My roots made me who I was and got me where I was, so I was proud of that and continued to try to spread those seeds further through the new outlets too.

**What have you been shooting since that time?**

Well, since the mid-90s I have not been shooting as much as I used to. I think I just have not been inspired by more recent stuff as much as I used to be. And that's not to say there is not stuff out there that is inspiring, but I'm not just out there seeking it as I once was. And, hell, I can't take every great photo out there. Gotta leave some of that to the current and younger generations. Those people really being moved by what's going on now should be shooting their own stuff, and they are, so that's not up to me. My time for that was golden, and if I feel I can do it as I once did, I will, but now it's time for people to shoot what they are a part of and what they love. I am not so much a part of those things these days. I'm older and I have further interests and a family. I think I helped spread the excitement and inspiration from those times when I was young and living it and creating it with all those people I've worked with and been friends with. You gotta be intimate with what you shoot; that's what makes the best photographs. I'm shooting great shots of my two-and-a-half-year-old son these days. I'm shooting more artistic and landscape-type stuff. I'm closer to that now, but again I must repeat, I still have the interest in skating and music, and that's why I shot a few weeks ago when we did. People were shredding; I had to get the shots. It was fun as hell.

**How has the change of equipment changed photography in general or your photography?**

Well, it's changed photography in general tremendously. For me, hardly. I still use film when I'm shooting something important. Digital to me can be fun, too, but I don't own a serious digital camera, just one that fits in my pocket. Digital photography is great in some ways, since it lets people enjoy and take many pictures without much further damage to the environment, but at the same time it's horrible because it makes people lazy, which blows me away. I guess when you're born with a technology you're always likely to just take it for granted. But, like I said, when I used to shoot, I had to make every shot count as much as I could, and then I had to wait usually three, four, or seven days before I would get to see the results of what I shot. It took a lot of time and a lot more effort to get the shots back then, and the mystery of not knowing what you were going to get until way after the fact. That made a big difference in how I shot and how most people shot back then. As "King" James Cassimus, the O.G. photo editor of SKATEBOARDER in the '70s, just wrote me a few days ago "Those were the days when you really had to know your shit! Now anyone with a digital camera can get a good exposed shot or just fix it later." It is true, it's a whole new ball game these days.



On this day, at the oasis-like Venice skatepark, I was meant to session with some old Dogtown brothers. But just like the old days, rarely did anything planned actually work out. I never met Omar Hassan before, but from what I hear he was just riding as hard as he always does. And for me, in the sweet spot of the hip, coming off the coping like he was, with aggression, I got my favorite shot on the only roll of film I shot that day.



# “AND, HELL, I CAN’T TAKE EVERY GREAT PHOTO OUT THERE. GOTTA LEAVE SOME OF THAT TO THE CURRENT AND YOUNGER GENERATIONS.”

The camera you used the other day at Venice, why could you not see the picture on the back like a normal camera?

Ha. That’s film; that’s the way the big boys do it. You know that. You’re an old fuck, almost as old as me.

It might be hard for readers to understand this, but there was a time skateboarding and skaters wanted nothing to do with remembering or even looking at anyone or thing from its past. Were you aware of this time, the ‘90s? Did you ever think that skateboarding as a whole would come back to appreciate the photos and that time in skateboarding?

Well I was kind of away from it during that period and, in fact, it’s part of the reason I started publishing my books: I didn’t want people to forget. I also wanted to re-inspire, because the fact is those guys did inspire legions. Without them, there would not be the sport/art we have today. I always had respect for my subjects, that’s why I did the work I did, and I wanted to help keep that spirit alive, particularly when I saw it fading. Those were incredibly creative times. I thought it was my duty as one of the prime motivators of the era to give these folks due justice in the form of a hardcover book, and at the same time legitimize it all in a way that only a hardcover book could do at the time, even though nowadays books get published left and right and have much less impact because of all the shit that’s put out there due to the current ease of publishing. But I believe the best always rise and will always be respected, admired, and borrowed from. And, I gotta say, these days, those old images of mine get appreciation from around the globe.

Street skating was really starting to become the new and exciting thing being invented and shot at the time you started to move on. At the same time, new teenage photographers were in place shooting all the newest skaters of that time. Was there a reason you did not document the birth of that? Or did you?

Honestly, I just was not that interested in that new direction skateboarding was going and, photographically at the time, I just could not get into it. The style was not there and only rarely, when something really heavy was going down, would I be into it. But the technical stuff? I’ve never been into technical stuff, not in skating, not in equipment, not in music, or in life. I’m feeling it when it’s from the soul more, you know? I just moved on. I personally skated as much as always, but just didn’t feel inspired to shoot it as much as I once did. I shot a ramp here or there, overseas street stuff when the locations were cool, and other rare instances, but it’s been pretty minimal skate-wise since the ‘80s.

What was the inspiration to shoot some skate photos again?

Well, I went down to check out the new skatepark in Venice on the beach. The Oasis is what I’d call it if it were not the name of an old skatepark in San Diego from the ‘70s. And I saw the level of riding going on there and I was just stoked, totally unknown to me. Kids not even sponsored shredding, tearing the shit out of the coping, and young kids, not even in their teens, getting air and shit, and, more importantly, a few of them with the traditional Dogtown style. I got stoked and I just had to come back down with my camera and shoot someone. Also, I had been meaning to come out to your pool since you invited me last year. I didn’t even care about what the level of skating would be. I knew you could ride well, but I just wanted to hang out with you and the family. Good people inspire me too, so I came out to just see y’all and have a good time. Next thing you know, a few people are there shredding. I had to get a couple of shots, remind everyone of how it’s done.

Get any of Glen’s books on his website at [BurningFlags.com](http://BurningFlags.com) or ask at your local bookstore.



Glen E. Friedman, getting the shot. “Sometimes you gotta get down and dirty.”



Vida Luz Dominguez